The DeLong's Were Early Fairbury Photographers

By: Dale C. Maley
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The story of the DeLong family began with the birth of Reuben F. DeLong (1802-1883) in Vermont. Reuben married Lydia B. Streator (1803-1889) in 1821 in Ohio when he was 19 years old. After they were married, Reuben and Lydia lived in Portage County, Ohio. Reuben and Lydia DeLong had seven children in Ohio.

One of the sons of Reuben DeLong was Cyrus Anson DeLong. He was born in 1828 in Ohio. In 1851, at the age of 22, C.A. DeLong married Sarah Matilda Fletcher (1834-1873) in Ohio. Cyrus and Sarah had a son Eugene in 1852 and another son Frank in 1854 while they were living in Ohio. Cyrus moved his family from Ohio to Wilmington, Illinois, around 1858. Their third son, William DeLong, was born in Wilmington in 1858.

In the 1860 U.S. Census, Reuben and Lydia DeLong lived in Esmen Township in Livingston County, Illinois. The only child still living with them was Dewitt DeLong.

In the same 1860 Census, Cyrus, his wife, and three sons lived in Wilmington, Illinois. Cyrus DeLong listed his occupation as a shoemaker on that census.

Another son of Reuben and Lydia DeLong was Gypson DeLong. In 1861, he enlisted in the Third Illinois U.S. Cavalry in Fairbury, Illinois. On his military application, he listed his occupation as a shoemaker. He became a bugler in this cavalry unit during the Civil War. This unit was primarily men from the Fairbury area.

Sometime between 1860 and 1864, C.A. DeLong moved his family from Wilmington to Fairbury. He also learned the photography trade. In 1864, his photography shop on Locust Street in Fairbury printed a photo of Andrew Voss. This 156-year-old photograph still survives today and is in excellent condition.

To raise money during the Civil War, the U.S. government passed a new law in 1864 requiring a tax stamp to be purchased and affixed to any photographs. The photographer had to buy a two-cent stamp if the picture price was 25 cents or less. A tax of three cents was required if the photo price was between 26 and 50 cents. A five-cent stamp was required for photos with a price between 51 cents and a dollar. For images with a price of one dollar or more, in addition to the five-cent stamp, an extra five cents was assessed for every additional dollar or fractional part thereof.

For this 1864 photograph taken in Fairbury, photographer C.A. DeLong complied with the federal law, and he affixed a five-cent tax stamp to the back of the picture. The use of the five-cent stamp indicated the price for the photo was between 50 cents and $1.00. In today's dollars, the cost of this photo was between $9.00 and $17.00.

In 1865, the State of Illinois conducted a census. In this census, Reuben DeLong and his photographer son C.A. DeLong lived in Indian Grove Township.
In 1905, the Blade published a photo showing the business buildings on the north side of Locust Street between Third and Fourth Streets. This photo was attributed to C.A. DeLong around the year 1865. The caption to this old photo recounted that Booth and DeLong had a shoe store in one building. The building next door had a business owned by Byron Phelps. The newspaper caption also stated that in 1867, a wood-burning TP&W locomotive caught the wooden elevator across the street on fire. The big fire jumped across the street and burned out the buildings on the north side of Locust Street.

The Chicago Tribune published a story about the big fire in 1867 in Fairbury. Their article reported that C.A. DeLong lost $500 in household goods in the fire.

In the 1870 U.S. Census, Reuben DeLong and his wife moved from Fairbury to Nebraska. No mention of C.A. DeLong and his family could be found in this census.

In that era, husbands and wives would often learn photography together. This practice allowed the couple to work together. Early Fairbury photographer A.J. Swap and his wife both learned photography so they could work together. It is likely that Mrs. C.A. DeLong also had learned the photography business.

Losing his photography business in a fire prompted C.A. DeLong to start investigating moving his photography business to Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the transition period of closing his Fairbury store and opening his Minneapolis store, he left his wife in charge of the Fairbury operation. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has an old photograph with the wording "Photographed by Mrs. DeLong, N.E. Corner of Fourth & Locust Sts., Fairbury, Ill."

By 1871, C.A. DeLong had moved to Minnesota, and he entered some of his photographs in the Minneapolis Fair. In 1873, sadness struck the DeLong family. Mrs. C.A. DeLong died at the age of only 38. Within one year of his first wife's death, C.A. DeLong married his second wife, Marietta Trumbull, in Minnesota. They had a son Joseph DeLong in 1875. In 1875, the State of Minnesota conducted a state-wide census. C.A. DeLong was recorded as living in Minneapolis.

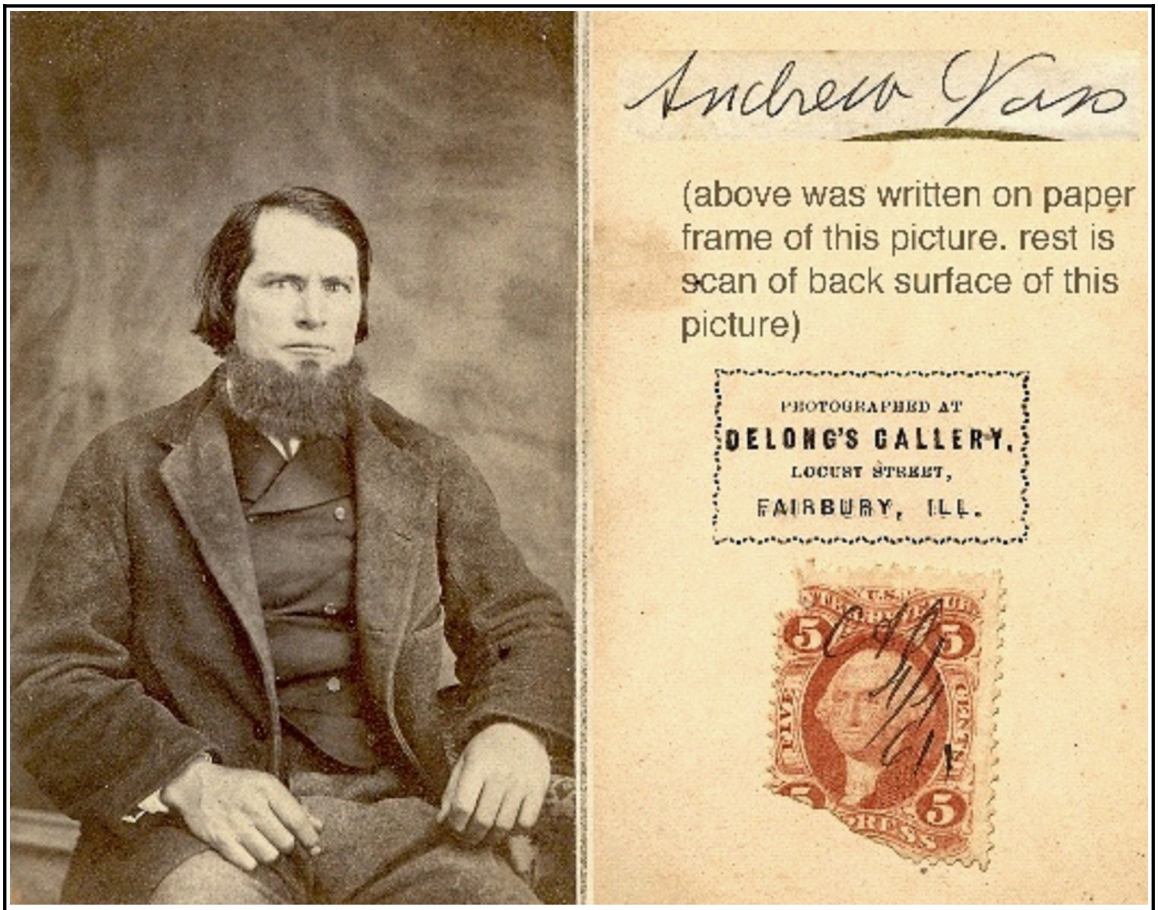
In 1925, the Blade published an article saying that C.A. DeLong took a photograph of the Old Settlers Association gathered at the first Fairbury Fair in 1876. Since this article was published almost 50 years after the event, the accuracy of the date is suspect. It is possible that C.A. DeLong returned from Minneapolis to attend the Fairbury Fair and took a photograph.

In 1878, the son of C.A. DeLong, 26-year-old Eugene DeLong, died unexpectedly at age 26 in Minneapolis. Young Eugene DeLong was a well-liked young man in Minneapolis.

In 1881, C.A. DeLong moved his photography business to Canton, South Dakota. His father, Reuben DeLong, had moved to this area several years before. Unfortunately, photographer C.A. DeLong passed away in 1883. He was only 55 years of age.

Mr. and Mrs. C.A. DeLong operated their Fairbury photography business between the years 1860 and 1871. It is incredible that some of C.A. DeLong's over 150-year-old photos still survive today and are in excellent condition.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including C.A. DeLong. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



1864 Photograph of Andrew Voss taken at DeLong's Gallery in Fairbury